THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78712

Center for Theoretical Physics
(512) 471-3751

26 Jan 1979

Professor Marcello Truzzi
Department of Sociology
Eastern Michigan University
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197

Dear Professor Truzzi –

I am delighted ~~that~~ with your new journal Zetetic Scholar – you'll be analyzing the sociology of pathological science. Bravo!

Sincerely yours,

John A. Wheeler

Enc. (a) Houston flyer
(b) Letter to Carey
(c) names of other members of AAAS Boards.

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12 January 1979

Dr. William D. Carey
American Association for the Advancement of Science
1776 Massachusetts Ave., NW
Washington, D. C. 20036

Dear Bill:

Quite innocently I found myself drawn into a controversy at the session on Science and Consciousness at the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Houston Monday morning, January 8. I had been asked to talk on the relation between quantum mechanics and consciousness. I discovered to my dismay after the program had been cast in concrete that Eugene Wigner and I, two people from the world of physics, were being put together on a panel with several parapsychologists. What is more, one of them and many of the audience were ready to call on the most extreme ideas out of physics. I am writing as a concerned member of the AAAS and as a former member of the board of directors and as a former president of the American Physical Society to ask that a five man committee of review be appointed by the board of directors and the council jointly to review the work of the section of parapsychology of the AAAS to determine:

(A) Whether this field of investigation by now has produced any "battle tested result,"

(B) To report on the advantage gained in fund raising by workers in the field of parapsychology by their association with the AAAS,

(C) To report on the effect of this association on the public image of the AAAS,

(D) To advise whether this section should be left "as is," suspended until the field has produced some "battle tested" results or deleted outright from the AAAS.

I know that the views of our late and beloved Margaret Mead were strong in getting parapsychology admitted to the AAAS. I was present at the meeting where it happened. The opinion that I had and many others had was overridden by the permissiveness of the time. The words might not have been used, but the idea was there of that old phrase, "Marry him to reform him." Now the decade of permissiveness has past.

Moreover, in the quantum theory of observation, my own present field of endeavor, I find honest work almost overwhelmed by the buzz of absolutely crazy ideas put forth with the aim of establishing a link between quantum mechanics and parapsychology--as if there were any such thing as "parapsychology." A young person who wants to work in this field does so at his risk. He runs the danger of earning, not reputation, but snickers. In this sense the association of "parapsychology" with the AAAS puts a strain on the progress of an important field of investigation. That is the origin of my concern and the reason I appeal to you for your good offices in setting up the "Committee for the Review of Parapsychology in the AAAS."

More background for this letter will be found in Appendices A & B of the attached paper, "Not consciousness, but the distinction between the probe and the probed, as central to the elemental quantum act of observation."

We have enough charlatanism in this country today without needing a scientific organization to prostitute itself to it. The AAAS has to make up its mind whether it is seeking popularity or whether it is strictly a scientific organization. Admiral Hyman G. Rickover has just this minute telephoned to back my position on making a clean break between the AAAS and parapsychology and authorizes me to quote him so.

Many thanks for your consideration.

Sincerely,

John

John Archibald Wheeler
Director, Center for Theoretical Physics, Professor of Physics
The University of Texas at Austin

JAWjtw Enc.: Manuscript presented at the Houston AAAS meeting

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1/1/79

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Zetetic scholar

An Independent Scientific Review of Claims of Anomalies and the Paranormal

Marcello Truzzi, *Editor*

JFeb. 2, 1979

Prof. John A. Wheeler
Center for Theoretical Physics
University of Texas at Austin
Austin, TX 78712

Dear Prof, Wheeler:

Thank you for sending me a copy of your AAAS paper and the other materials. I am afraid that we may have some disagreement on what constitutes pathology in science. I very much share your skepticism towards claims of psi, but I truly think your labelling serious (even if misguided) study of such possibilities "pathological" or "pseudoscience" is certainly frequently true but may also be quite incorrect when applied to some of the parapsychological research. In my view, pseudoscience must be demonstrated to be false science. It can be false science in many different ways (incompetence, nonfalsifiability, fraud, etc.), but it seems to me that an honest and responsible approach to the empirical world to test implausible possibilities does not in itself constitute a pathology or a false approach. Science consists of its method and perspective towards the world (seeking to let the facts determine the correctness of our theories); science does not consist of the particular body of substantive knowledge at any one time in history. I have called those who seek to gain scientific legitimacy for their views, by following the canons of scientific method and justification, protosciences. The history of science has shown many instances where personal conviction without adequate scientific evidence has led to someone ultimately producing intersubjective evidence that convinced other scientists and justified the claims intially branded preposterous (a good example is to be found in the history of meteorites).

The world of parapsychology is full of charlatans and fools, but it seems to me that in a democratic society science must tolerate those seeking to prove the outrageous so long as they agree as to the ground rules of what constitutes scientific proof. It is for this reason that I feel that the AAAS should accomodate protosciences as well as those fully accepted. As far as I can see, much of sociology and psychology is at least equally pseudo-

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scientific when compared to parapsychology. In fact, much of the work on psi is far more methodologically sophisticated than work found in psychology and sociology. The social sciences in general are not Established Sciences in the same sense as physics. I would argue that much of sociology is protoscientific, and many would agree with me (especially outside my discipline). Following the logic in your argument against parapsychology, why not eject the social sciences from the AAAS? The case would be even stronger to eject psychiatry since there is much empirical evidence that psychiatry does damage rather than help much of anyone.

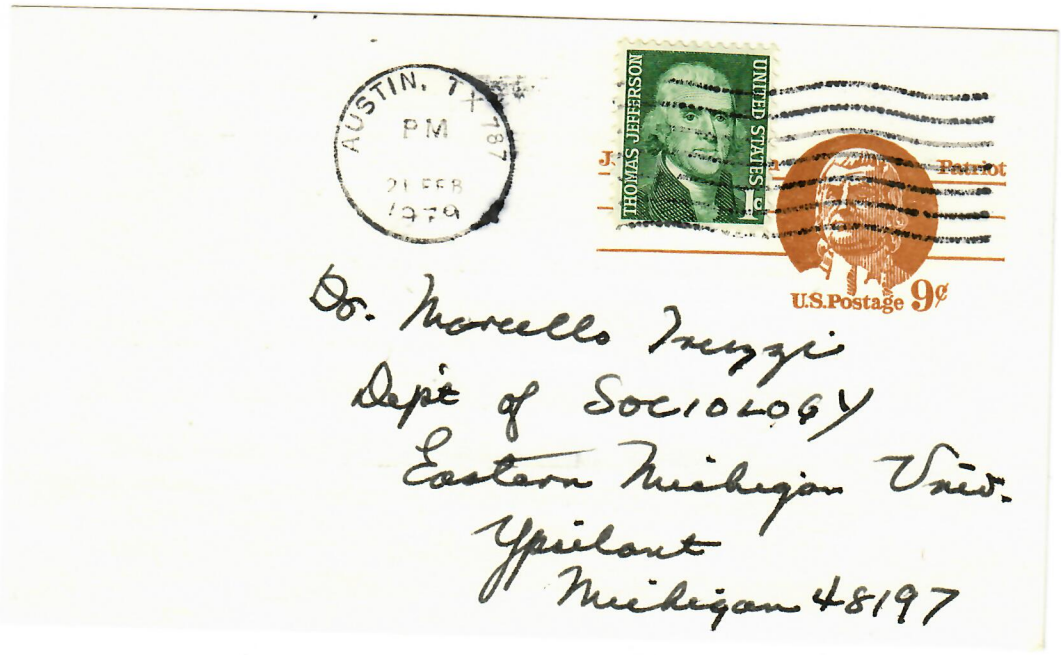
From what I have seen of parapsychology, a minority of its practitioners (mainly those in the Parapsychology Association) are serious protoscientists. They seek legitimacy from fellow scientists not merely for the status it gives them (most of the PA members are Ph. D. s in psychology or other fields who may actually be hurting themselves professionally by even doing psi research at all) but in part to seek refuge from the sea of frauds and nonsense in the popular literature dealing with psi. The responsible pro-psi people I know are anxious to dissociate themselves from most of the nonsense that truly is pseudoscience in their area. I would argue that ejecting them from the AAAS would drive them into the areas where they could get support but from which many of them would like refuge. Let me give you a parallel example: Michel Gauquelin is a psychologist interested in possible cosmic correlations which are implausible but which seem to exist if one can believe the replicated studies thus far. Gauquelin is very much anti-astrology but the astrologers often cite him as "evidence" for their side. Since many scientists consider his findings implausible and likely due to error (if not fraud), they have frequently called what Gauquelin is doing pseudoscientific. This forces him into the only friendly arena he can find. He is doing legitimate scientific work but his results are extraordinary and give "aid and comfort to the enemy" much as parapsychological claims have been used by those who hold antiscientific views. I would propose that we seek to win over those like Gauquelin who accept the scientific ground rules and insist that they "put up or shut up." You seem in part to agree with this but may feel that the parapsychologists have had enough time to "put up" and have failed so should shut up. But I think the evidence favors the parapsychologists on this score since there does seem to have been some real progress towards a replicable experiment in the last 10 years. I remain a doubter, but some psi claims (e.g., telepathy) are less extraordinary than others (e.g., precognition), and my scientific concern with not making a Type II error (as in statistics) and thinking nothing special is happening when it rarely may be happening, forces me to avoid final judgements.

I enclose a copy of a paper which will be appearing shortly in an AAAS volume on unconventional science. I think it makes my position a bit clearer, and I hope you might find it of interest.

I also enclose a copy of ZETETIC SCHOLAR for your amusement if not enjoyment. I hope you might want to enter the dialogues I am starting.

Cordially,

Marcello Truzzi



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Dear Dr ~~USA~~ Trigg - 8A

This is to acknowledge with thanks the receipt of Your letter of Feb 2. Your points are well made & the material is fascinating though I still think we're keeping the public to be misled by leaving Para. associated formally with AAAS.

20 Feb 78

JOHN ARCHIBALD WHEELER
Director, Center for Theoretical Physics

Warm good wishes! John Wheeler